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How to Think about the Balkans: Culture, Region, Identity

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IN QUEST OF BALKAN OCCIDENTALISM

ABSTRACT: The article seeks to revise the current mainstream interpretation of the relations between the Balkans and the West as it has emerged from the mirror reading of the Balkanism paradigm. It interrogates the grounds for interpreting the Western discourse about the Balkans in terms of Said's Orientalism and the Balkan visions of Europe in terms of the hegemonic Western discourse.

By way of introduction, or Balkan Studies as “Oriental” Studies?

Taking up the subject of Balkan perspectives on Europe, I was fully aware of the necessity to think of it in the light of the criteria by which a region is defined, mapped, theorized and explained. As long as the available analyses of the relations between Europe and the Balkans had sought to draw upon broader tendencies or theoretical models, these models had no local origin or purposes. They were designed at other places and for other purposes, as a result of which the Balkans have been assessed in terms of their resemblance to or deviation from Western Europe.¹ This is the common drawback with the Balkan application of all theories that had emerged since the end of the 18th century under the roof of the two grand paradigms – the modernization (or evolutionist) and the neo-Marxist (drawing upon the opposition between center and periphery). Over the last few years, Orientalist, post-colonial and post-structuralist criticism have succeeded in challenging the very core of these frameworks by shifting the focus to a deconstruction of the conventional Western image of the Balkans. Critical effort has been invested in demystifying the “Balkan construct”, and the hegemonic Western discourse which nourishes it. Although the level of professional sophistication in the application of this criticism varies, there is little doubt that if over the last decades the study of the Balkans has laid claim to the status of a meaningful field of research – that is, if the field has generated knowledge that could affect the methods and categories used by other fields (such as historiography, anthro-

¹ For a critical reading of the so called “mental maps” of the Balkans, see more specifically Bracewell and Drace-Francis, 1999; Todorova, 2002; Todorova, 2005.

pology, cultural studies) as well as the theoretical (Western) models of exploring “the Other” – the credit should largely be given to those projects that have involved the field in a direct dialogue with the theoretical and conceptual discussions in other areas. As far as the Balkan historiography is concerned, most productive in this respect has proved the dialogue with Edward Said’s Orientalist approach. The Western “imagining” of the Balkans clearly shares many generic features with Said’s “Orientalism”. And while “Balkanism”, the analysis of which has become the sign of the new academic status of the historical study of the Balkans, may be sensitive to historical and cultural difference, its links with Said’s criticism are evident as is the acknowledgment of the benefits from the application of this approach to the “theorizing” of the Balkans.² The intention of this text is not to prove or dismiss, as an end in itself, the interpretative potential of the Orientalist approach with regard to the Balkans. It should rather be seen as an attempt at highlighting the ability of research of the Balkans to trigger reconsideration, broadening, and revision of this and other theoretical approaches and concepts with a key role in contemporary social science. Specifically my aim is to interrogate the current mainstream interpretation of the relations between the Balkans and the West, as it has emerged from the mirror reading of the Balkanism paradigm.³ I share with the late Ellie Scopetea the belief, which she formulated at the height of the Orientalist-paradigm’s acclaim, that an attempt to include the Balkans into the Saidian abstract Orient would have changed the whole logic of the Orientalist argument by means of bringing to the foreground the historical dimensions of the East-West relationship (Scopetea, 1991: 133) This implies to take full account not only of conspicuous incompatibilities such as the absence of Western colonialism or a Western Balkanist tradition. These are truly fundamental deficiencies in the sense of Said’s conception, and any effort to compensate for them through their metaphoric or imaginary versions on the assumption that the latter are identical with the real ones, will not bring us far.⁴ How important these incompatibilities are in terms of the Balkan at-

- 2 Maria Todorova, who is the first researcher to have attempted a systematic structural discrimination between Balkanism and Orientalism, has defined this link as follows: “To deny, however, or even downplay a connection with Said resembles (although on an incomparably more modest level) the efforts to disclaim any connection with, and even profess aversion for, Marx, while ...deeply internalizing and unconsciously reproducing Marx’s immense contribution to how we theorize today about society” (Тодорова, 1999: 36-37).
- 3 An earlier and shorter version of this paper was published by the journal of the Romanian Institute for Southeast European Studies (Mishkova, 2004).
- 4 An example of such analytically dubious, and in the final analysis, trivializing identification of “real” with “literary” colonization comes in Goldsworthy, 1998. “The imperialism of imagination” is, of course, a legitimate and intriguing research topic but the attempt to inscribe it in the Orientalist model yields more losses than gains (cf. also Fleming: 1220-1223). On a more general level, the application of (the rhetoric) of the post-colonial model to the Balkans has a similar and – in view of its implicit intentions – ironic effect: it prevents post-colonial criticism from binding itself more closely with the sociology of power relations beyond literary radicalism. Failing to do so, it actually relinquishes its claim to having an impact on these relations.

titudes to Europe will be discussed further down. Following the critical line of thought more intriguing to me still is the issue of the Balkans' peculiar position vis-à-vis the "West" and of the differences in the representation of this peculiar position in different periods of history. Similarly, the dynamics of national self-images – of the way the Balkan societies have described and evaluated themselves – demonstrate such social and ideological functionality that can hardly be understood in terms of a Western hegemony on the local production of autonarratives. On the level of generalization the little that can be safely maintained is that modernity has starkly underscored and complicated the Balkans' ambivalent geographic, cultural and civilizational status. It is this geographic and cognitive liminality, at the same time, that makes the Balkan studies "the terrain that is most rich with theoretical possibility", with the potential to "contribute most to the theoretical frameworks of inquiry used by a broad array of fields and disciplines" (Fleming: 1223; 1231) I would like to probe this revisionist potential by keeping an eye on the contributions already made in this direction while, at the same time, seeking to expand and partly rework them. Concretely, I shall attempt to identify a set of fundamental contextual elements, above all those characterising the spread of knowledge about Europe – the agencies of this transmission in particular – which have been largely ignored in relevant discussions. To understand this choice, as well as my approach, it is important to emphasize that I see it as an initial attempt at addressing the topic of the Balkan visions of Europe, i.e. of Balkan "Occidentalism".⁵

Some underlying premises

A word on terminology is in order at the outset. The notion "Europe" or the "West", as I use it here, is stripped of essentialist meaning in the historical, cultural, geographic or any other sense of the term. "Europe" is understood as a contested concept, a trope conveying contradictory, contextually and historically contingent meanings and images, which have been translated into political, ideological or cultural programmes (Stråth: 14). As we shall see in the case of the Balkans, it was the entwining of the project of modernity with the notion of "Europe", in other words, the entanglement of utopian and real meanings, that accounts for the resilience of the term "Europe" and for the difficulties involved in any attempt to unravel its anatomy. My use of the notion is, thus, informed by awareness both of the plurality of contents and

5 My perception of "Occidentalism" is broader than that of Ian Buruma and Avishay Margalit (Buruma and Margalit, 2004) for whom it represents "a set of views, prejudiced opinions, hostility and misconceptions of Western civilization on the part of non-Western nations". Ideally, I would seek to explore the Balkan perspective on the West and its civilization not (only) in the sense of stereotyped perceptions and applications, but above all as a contextualized debate on modernity and society; a debate that would take into account pragmatic and empirical as well as utopian and anti-utopian components.

forms, which the “idea of Europe” spawned over time and of the analytical objections to treating “(Western) Europe” as an entity and a coherent unit of analysis. It is, at the same time, easier to presume that just as the discourse of Balkanism has helped to shape the self-understanding of Europe, so too have Balkan perceptions of Europe shaped local narratives of collective cultural and social identity. Various, contested meanings of Europe have become facets of modern national self-consciousness: the identities of nations are inscribed in the identities of Europe and identities of Europe are inscribed in the identities of nations (Malmborg and Stråth: 9). In this endeavor, of course, the language of communication was that of the West. Knowledge about the Balkans, including the paradigms and fundamental concepts in which that knowledge was expressed, was not produced in the Balkans. Yet this helps us little in addressing the various “self-constitutive strategies” chosen by the people of the region (and not imposed in a colonial manner) or the “constitutive result” achieved. That is why in the following account the visions about the national and the European will be partially and analytically isolated from each other but always thought of in relation to each other. In denying an essentialist understanding of (Western) Europe, we also deny the existence of a would-be monolithic, non-controversial centre – or Other – in relation to which the Balkans or parts of it has defined themselves. Firstly, the ideological power of “Europe” was not the result of an ideological control or even interest on the part of the European centre – the interest and the initiatives were, as a rule, one-way, from the Balkans towards Europe, and indiscriminating. At the same time, on account of a number of cultural commonalities, the culture of the Russian “metropolis” was at least as formative for the Balkan Slavic nations as that of Europe proper (Лилова: 7374 passim). The nature of the Russian civilizational matrix, however, was hybrid and competitive, ripped between the Orthodox Slavdom and “Europe” and marked by the rift between cultural uniqueness and cultural inferiority but also by receptiveness to Western models – a “metropolis” projecting a civilizing mission into its own “barbarious zone”. The context of nineteenth-century Ottoman rule should also be taken seriously. National historiographies in the region, largely echoing the inherent problems of Europe’s self-narration vis-à-vis “Turkey-in-Europe”, have typically tended to either ignore the Ottoman contributions to the progressive changes of the time or interpret Ottoman rule in a fully negative way, as hindering or delaying genuine assimilation into Europe. In this way, Balkan historiographies continue to replicate the opposition of the Ottoman to the European and, thereby, underestimate the impact of the modernizing reforms of the Ottoman empire on the existing notions about modernity and Europe. A historian must be careful to generalize in this respect about the whole of the Balkan region. It is not possible to chart all the channels that had played a role in the process of transmission. This article should rather be seen as an initial attempt to map the major venues of acquiring informed and encompassing visions about “Europe” and their articulation in the public

space during the 19th century. Empirical data will be primarily drawn from the case of Bulgaria, even though I believe that some, if not all, of the conditions discussed below are applicable to other Balkan countries.

* * *

From Serbia to Bulgaria and, somewhat less conspicuously, Greece to Romania, in the 19th century most of those who took part in nation-building and disseminating knowledge about Europe acquired an understanding of Europe in the educational institutions on the “periphery” of Europe, not its center. That had no doubt facilitated the assimilation of certain “lessons” but had also encoded, from the very start, certain formative conceptions as well as frustrations in the makeup of the local national cultures. The (semi-)peripheral transmitting cultures, moreover, were far from monolithic. The various intellectual or political trends they contained usually had varying degrees of interest or capacities to influence “smaller” or “inferior” cultures.

The Greek factor: the closest mirror

Up until the 1830s, the leading Bulgarian “metropolis” was Greece: the roster of Bulgarian alumni of Greek schools reads like a Who’s Who in the National Revival, and practically all Bulgarian books, “Western” translations in particular, were translated or compiled from Greek sources (Clarke: 178). To a large extent, the same was true of the Romanian late Enlightenment and early nationalist figures and sources (Tziovas: 4-5). Consequently, the Greek threat to Bulgarian and Romanian national identities, typically seen as acculturation into the Greek *ethnie*, is testified by the longstanding struggle against Greek cultural influence. The history of this struggle has been sufficiently well investigated from the point of view of the emergence of Balkan nationalisms. But there were several co-lateral effects of that encounter, which had decisive impact on the relation of the incipient Balkan national cultures, Bulgaria in particular, with the outside world. The Western discourse about the Balkans, so remarkably dealt with by Maria Todorova, was not the only and, as far as its formative phase was concerned, not even the most important “symbolic centre” for Bulgarian national self-identity. At the gates of their modernity and before reformulating their “barbarity” in the looking glass of “Europe”, Bulgarians were left to cope with a twofold stigma: a social one within the Ottoman hierarchy (coupled with a traumatizing collective memory) and a cultural one vis-à-vis the Greeks. It was not so much Greek cultural supremacy per se that annoyed the incipient Bulgarian nationalists, but rather their tendency to transform this supremacy into an essentialist register of “formative absences” which later would be reconfirmed while gazing at themselves in the mirror of Europe. “It is preordained that those peoples who have no history and lack a glorious past should move at a snail’s pace, indeed crawl

backwards as crabs on the wide road of civilization and close their eyes to the light [of knowledge]... So is it preordained to the Bulgarians, who cannot boast of ancestors and golden pages of History... to remain removed from the light of civilization..." (Македония III, 14). Many re-prints of this kind from the nineteenth-century Greek press in Bulgarian periodicals reinforced pre-existent stereotypes and supplied the Bulgarian national identity with an original "dark zone" to be later re-filled from other sources. The image of the simple and uncivilized Christian Slav peasant (even when attenuated by attributes such as "quiet", "peaceful", "hospitable", "hardworking") made its appearance in Greek writings at a time when the ethnonym "Bulgarian" was still used in the "West" in the parabolic sense of Voltaire's *Candide* (Livanios: 71-77). Such social and cultural representations did not become significant until the advent of modernity, but this need not specially concern us here. One also cannot fail to register the Western optics, through which the Balkan actors viewed each other: in the creation of Balkan stereotypes, at any rate, the West was not acting alone (Scopetea, 2003: 174-175). What I wish to stress here, however, is that the collective stigma attached to the Bulgarians, the "incompleteness" of a national self, did not primarily originate from an encounter with the West – it was only reconfigured by the West in the course of the Bulgarians' modern national self-creation. This episode in the formation of Bulgarian national identity is illuminating and leads directly to the core of my argument – to the problem of the *agencies spreading knowledge about "Europe"*.

There has been, at that time or later, little doubt about the key role of Greek schools and "sources" in the spread of new ideas and discoveries of the modern age throughout the Ottoman empire. Prior to their dissemination throughout the Balkans, however, the ideas and discoveries in question were filtered through "Greek" selection and adaptation. As a leading historian of modern Bulgarian literature had noted, "From Greece, after having undergone some modifications appropriate to the Greek conditions, [Western rationalism] was spread among us." (Пенев, III: 66). Such transmissions had not only influenced the recipient's agenda: indeed, it is well-known that the Bulgarians had fully borrowed the "awakening" and "patriotic" action plan of the Greeks. But the very visions Bulgarians from the Revival period had of their national identity in the context of European civilization, albeit shaped in competition with the Greek ones, were largely modeled upon the Greek rather than the European pattern. This process of "defense through mimicry", i.e. of "mimetic generation of Bulgarian ideas through the appropriation of analogous Greek constructs", as Elena Nalbantova puts it, has its origin with the proto-Enlightenment "Slavo-Bulgarian History" of Paissiy Hilendarsky and appears in a number of guises later in history. Most radical among them is Georgy Rakovsky's attempt "to reinterpret thoroughly the established perception of center and periphery, of cultural mother-country and cultural 'colonies'"

as well as “to [discredit] Europe as a civilizational super-authority and supermodel to the nations of the Modern Age.” (Налбантова, 2005) But the Greek filter of Western ideas were of importance for another reason. A great many Balkan revivalists held a belief, characteristic of the Greek Enlightenment, that “intellectual revival” prepared the ground for all other kinds of advancement, the “political revival” in particular: the intellectual revival had caused the rise of the West, that of the East also rests in it. This is how the earliest totalizing utopia and discourse of Europe – as a synonym of rationality, knowledge and universalism – had emerged. The utopia was predicated on a no doubt benevolent, enlightenedly-optimistic interpretation of Europe, which stressed the idea that “*Europe*” was about *becoming rather than being*. Europe was thus not an inherited status so much as a something achieved through the spread of learning and reason, and the road to it was opened to any one individual, or any one nation, that could grasp and implement the “principles of the enlightenment”. From this perspective, both the model of and the ambiguities accompanying the construction of modern Greek identity acquire a special significance for the Bulgarians. As we well know, Europe’s founding myth is rooted in ancient Greece. This, in turn, wielded strong influence on the creation of modern Greek self-identity. Yet for nineteenth-century Greeks, the most tangible and credible testimony to its cultural continuity was not classical antiquity, which was considered to be “an alien and incomprehensible fiction”, but instead the “living tradition” of the Orthodox Church. This “identity split” is intriguing, for it forms the basis for a long-standing antinomy in the definition of ‘real’ Greece and its relation to the West. The one side was progressive, secular and rational, but pointing to an unknown and alien modernity; the other, by contrast, was retrograde, religiously zealous and anti-liberal, yet embodied in everyday practices. These spiritual and cultural tensions had influence on Greek perceptions of Europe, and the representations of the European Otherness “developed as a direct reflection of the blurred and contradictory image of Greece itself”. Significantly the “discursive opposition between the archetypes of Hellenes and Romans (*Romioi*), is conceptualized as a confrontation between two mutually exclusive modes of existence, and as a conflict between two incompatible normative universes” (Tsoukalas: 35-40; Herzfeld: 19-21). This intellectual milieu nurtured – via schooling and printed texts – the first generation of Balkan (not only Bulgarian) enlighteners-cum-nationalists. It will require much more space to trace its implications outside the ethnically Greek domain. But there is little reason to doubt its diffuse impact. Almost everywhere in the Balkans, the quest for a normative national past pervaded the efforts at nation-building and marked the seminal debates of the time, which focused on language, ethnogenesis, and nationalization of the church. In these debates, the Byzantine legacy and tradition of Eastern Christianity became key reference points that marked two ends of a single axis in the self-image and representation of European Otherness. To the present date, mainstream historiographies in the West and the

Balkan East continue to be crucially involved in the discussion.⁶ The spread of Western ideas through Greece had further impact. The prominent role of Russian culture in shaping the self-understanding of Bulgarians came neither from Russian expansionism nor from Western indifference; instead, it was above all the result of a conscious, sustained and ultimately successful attempts on behalf of a section of the Bulgarian national leadership “to debunk the ideology and the outlook of Hellenism” by laying all the stakes on Russian education, Russian support, Russian culture and cultural production.⁷ The “Bulgarian-Hellenic antithesis”, Boris Yotsov argues in his analysis of this process, “is now replaced with the Slavic-Hellenic opposition. This means that against Hellenic education, which is a source of pride for the Greeks, and which they use to scoff at Bulgarians’ plebeian peasant illiteracy, is pitted another culture, equally elevated, politically conscious and noble, if we use Fotinov’s words, which Bulgarians feel to be their own, and which gives them the courage to proudly face the Greek.” (ЙОЦОВ: 21) In other words, “the Greek identity” of the emerging modern Bulgarian elite as well as Greek “Orientalism” with regard to Bulgarians, were dismantled not by Bulgarians themselves, but by Russian and Habsburg Slavacists: all the ingredients of the national self (medieval past, language, culture, folklore) became known to the world through the eyes of a foreign, benevolent yet controversial “significant Other”.

Eastern and Western Slavism: “Occident Express” or “Pan-Slav Inquisition”?

This now takes us to the ambivalent role of Russia as a transmitter and occasionally source of the “constitutive Gaze”: in the Serbian and the Bulgarian contexts at least, the proportions of Russian and non-Russian “transfers” in printed texts were quite evenly balanced. After 1838, Russia played a preeminent role in the preparation of the Bulgarian revivalist intelligentsia. Over two-thirds of all Bulgarian students between 1856 and 1878 received their higher education in Russia; Russian-educated patriots dominated the movement for Bulgarian education and the “learning” of the Slavo-Bulgarian past.

- 6 “Enlightened” European historiography, as found for instance in Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, set the standard for the mainstream European conceptions of Byzantium and Greek Orthodoxy characterizing them as forms of Oriental barbarism. On the other hand, in a rare attempt to map the cultural “unity” of the Balkan space, Paschalis Kitromilides has traced this unity – what he calls the “Balkan mentality” – to Orthodox Christianity (Kitromilides: 163-191). Between these two temporal poles we find the synthetic statements of Balkan visionaries like Ivan Shishmanov, Jovan Cvijić, Nikolae Iorga, Ivan Duychev etc., for whom (the legacy of) Byzantium and (Enlightenment) Europe were invariably the problematic coordinates in their attempts to define the Balkan cultural community.
- 7 Until after the Crimean war of 1853-1856, all initiatives for establishing Bulgarian national education with the financial assistance and under the control of Russia came from Bulgarian leaders and “revivalists”, and not from the Russian government, Tsarist court, or Russian-Orthodox Church (Генчев, 2002: 40-99).

In Russia, on the other hand, Slavophiles (and Pan-Slavs) with financial and organizational resources at their disposal took an intense interest in establishing “cultural connections” with Russia’s “smaller brothers”; by contrast, Russian liberals remained fairly disinterested in such endeavors (Артемов, 2001: 46-47). Slavophilism and official Russian policy, furthermore, were in fundamental accord in seeking to prevent links between Balkan Christians, Slavs or non-Slavs alike, and the ‘West’. These cultural, political and religious policies gave rise in the recipient Slavic cultures to often controversial attitudes towards the West – by themselves an interesting subject of comparative enquiry that still lays ahead of us. In Serbia, the intellectual and political leadership, which was educated in the traditions of two imperial peripheries – the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian – constituted the main supplier of “Western knowledge” throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Secular Western influences were often transmitted by Greeks, the two noteworthy exceptions of direct European inspiration being Dositej Obradović and Vuk Karadžić, who infused Southslav breath into the philological Romanticism of the Western Slavs. During its first decades, the Serbian state was administered and “cultivated” almost wholly by ex-Habsburg Serbs educated in Austrian or Hungarian schools; their outlook and the models they were seeking to implant bore the strong imprint of the Central-European intellectual milieu and statecraft, while their political predilections were for the Panslavs (Трговчевић: 262; Мишкова: 17-45). The first generation of “proper” Serb intellectuals having graduated from Western universities did not appear until the late 1850s. The political and cultural credo of this new generation of Serb intellectuals was a mixture of Western political liberalism, Italian and Hungarian romantic “youth” nationalism, Czech- and Polish-nurtured Panslavism, and local paternalism. Politically, it was Russia rather than Europe to which they were looking for support. To be sure, the 1880s were marked by an initial process of differentiation among Serbian intellectuals, including attitudes towards ‘Europe’. Nevertheless, university study continued to take place primarily in the Dual Monarchy up to the outbreak of the Great War.⁸ The standard history of the Bulgarian revival, “*The Ancient and Present Day Bulgarians in Their Political, Ethnographic, Historical and Religious Relations with the Russians*” (1829) by the Ukrainian historian and Habsburg-trained slavist Yuri Vene-

8 The intellectual environment of the Habsburg *Mittleuropa* was complex enough to evade shortcut definition. One of the many indications of the underlying tensions that distinguished it were the disparate meanings of Europe and universalism informing one another: the concept of Europe, which signified a drive to progress and the future, and the concept of *Abendland* or Occident, which implied the traditional mission of *Kultur* with its roots in Occidental Christianity and the imperial past. Austria’s projection of itself as situated between the (predominantly Slavic) East and the French *l’Europe* was, in the words of G. Weiss, one of a “middle-range enlightenment”, or a “middle-range Europe”. As for the French *l’Europe*, it was also hesitant about the Empire’s European belonging. Whereas some, like Louis Léger, included Austria, next to Russia, into Eastern Europe, others discriminated between the “Eastern Europe” of the Romanov dynasty and the “Central Europe” of the Hohenzollerns. (Adamovsky: 606)

lin, illustrates some of the implications of this trajectory. Here is the story in brief. The founding fathers of Slavic Studies and ‘archeologists’ of Slavic Europe, as it is well known, came from Germany, Prague and Vienna. Researchers like Stritter (1740-1801), Thunmann (1746-1778), and Schloezer (1735-1809) gave flesh to Leibnitz’s proposition that historical origins should be studied through language classification, placing thereby philology firmly at the center of the study of racial origins and history. The central problem of Slavic studies thereby became focused on the role of the Cyrillic alphabet and “Old Bulgarian”. Accordingly, the central issue of Bulgarian historiography, from Paisiy to M. Drinov became the weighing of the Slavic against the Asiatic origins of Bulgarians. As James Clarke rightly noted, “These related problems gave Bulgaria a key place in the world of European scholarship” (Clarke: 99). But at the hands of the Pan-Slav historians of the 19th century, such as Venelin, the obsession with this issue had several regressive effects, such as bringing to Bulgaria the ideology of elected Slavdom. As regards Slavic civilization Bulgaria became a classical reference point, as Greece was with respect to European civilization: “the classical country for Russia, Lithuania and Hungary” and the home of “our sacred tongue”, as Venelin states of Bulgaria (Гачев: 134-135). Through Venelin’s exalted Pan-Slavism, Bulgarians first became acquainted with (German) romanticism and (what happened to be, Bohemian) nationalism. N.V. Saveliev-Rostislavich, Venelin’s fervent disciple and popularizer, was no less highly regarded, especially by some key figures of national education like Vassil Aprilov and Konstantin Fotinov. Nadya Danova’s painstaking research has made it clear that if Fotinov and the considerable number of readers of his journal happened to know something about significant European thinkers like Bacon, Vico, Herder, Gibbon, Thiéry, Michelet etc., the credit should be given to this passionate pan-Slavist. Besides, it is through the work of Rostislavich and Venelin that the architects of modern Bulgarian genealogy like Fotinov and Rakovsky acquired and widely applied the etymological method, whereby they could prove the pristine ancient origin and the global presence of Slavic Bulgarians. (Данова: 62-63; 306-308) For Rakovsky’s grand plot, for instance, the pathos, the “findings” and the conclusions of early Russian Pan-Slavism must have been no less important, or at least compatible with his theory about Bulgarians’ founding role in European culture, than the imitation of Greek Antiquity. By around the mid-nineteenth century, as Boyan Penev has rightly asserted, European Romanticism had reached the Balkan (South) Slavs in a form already “transformed and assimilated” by Western Slavs and supplied with a “distinct patriotic tinge” (ПЕНЕВ, II: 132). The task of familiarizing Bulgarians with the foundations of their Slavic and European cultural identity – a task taken up in the earlier period but committed mostly to Russian amateurs – came to be tackled in an authoritative manner by professional Western (Czech, Polish, Slovak and Slovenian) Slavicists working within the confines of the Habsburg Empire. The cumulative effect of these developments was the forging of “a Bul-

garian ‘national philosophy’ on a Slavic basis”. “National romanticism now evolved into historical mysticism; it verged on some kind of Bulgarian messianism, which, with its autochthonic theory of the origin of Bulgarians, provided the rationale for Beron’s philosophical speculations, whereas with Rakovsky it layed the foundations of a cultural and political tendency – debunking Hellenism as a culture, ideology and outlook.” (Йоцов: 29) The trajectory of Serbian romantic Slavophilism is quite similar. When Jovan Skerlić, the great turn-of-the-century literary critic of Serbia, set about tracing the historical roots of the concept of the Slav people as a young, fresh “race”, “which will take over the rudder of Europe from the weary, worn-out Westerners and so save it from destruction” (Čolović: 90), he discovered them in Herder and, indirectly, in the conceptions of Hegel and Fichte about the German cultural mission. Yet, Skerlić argued, “The Slavophiles went logically further and maintained that this spiritual hegemony was being taken over by the rested, fresh Slavs, that the authority in the spiritual world belonged to them, and that their culture was the greatest thing that the human spirit had created” (Skerlić: 167). Significantly though, these “Slavophile ideas reached the Serbs from the Czech and Slovak Pan-Slavs, above all Kollar and Štur, and not from the Russian Orthodox Pan-Slavs, Aksakov and Khomyakov, as might have been expected”. Štur’s “belief in Slavdom”, in particular, implied “that it was for the Slavs to resurrect enfeebled humanity, to replace the worn-out Latin and incomplete Germanic civilization, to found a great Slav empire of full, humane and ideal civilization” (Skerlić: 140; 8) “Educate yourselves, educate yourselves, good, respectable Bulgarians!”, V. Belinski counseled in 1840s. The impact Russian Slavophile anti-Westernism had on Balkan thought will become clearer if we hear what the Russian “Westerners”, such as Belinski, had to say. “Until then [when “respectable” Bulgarians are educated – D.M.]”, Belinski counsels, “try to advise your champions and Slavophiles in general of more civility and humaneness... Our Spanish [inquisitors], and your guardians, are ready to establish in no time an inquisition designed to exterminate the Europe-loving (sic) spirit and the spread of Asia-loving obscurantism, i.e. ignorance. [...] Yes, enlighten yourselves, good Bulgarians! May God grant you success! ... Only, for heavens sake, beware of protectors who through their protection undermine and harm you more than the Turks” (Априлов: 380-381). The relation between Slavdom and Orthodoxy as a cultural counteraction to “Europeanization” can only be broached here. As Konstantin Leontiev points out in a memorandum of 1865, addressed to General N. Ignatiev, Russia should not go only as far as opposing Europeanism on a political and religious basis. “It is advisable”, Leontiev suggested, “that the Greeks and the Slavs see us not only as a political force of the same religious denomination, but also as a peculiar state- and national life form and a peculiar society; even better, they should see us as a peculiar people and a peculiar literature, unique with its freshness in today’s world, as well as a peculiar historical science, which is continually making progress...” (Русия и

българското...: 211) Leontiev's well-known search for a symbiosis between Slavdom and Byzantium as an "antidote against the illnesses of Europeanization" should not be easily translated into judgments about the fundamental anti-Westernism of Russian culture. It should be recognized, however, that a considerable part of Bulgarians and Serbs saw Europe as being distinct from, often opposed to, Slavdom-and-Orthodoxy. "Which sphere of spiritual influence do we belong to – the Slavic, the Russian or the European? And could we overcome this cultural Slavic-European dualism by seeking an organic synthesis?" (Йоцов: 43) In the 20th century, this question would keep nagging at the minds of Bulgarian and Serbian spiritual leaders, because it continued to be part of (the unresolved issue of) the identity of national culture and consciousness. One has to be cautious with easy conclusions: a Russian university diploma was not necessarily a seal of anti-Westernism, nor a Western one -of pro-Westernism. The "spiritual link" with Russia could work in many ways as geopolitics did with respect to culture: because the Serbs, unlike the Poles, Romanians or Bulgarians, felt little threat of being "swallowed" or invaded by the Russian multitude (in contrast to their fears from the Germans or the Hungarians), they could vent their frustrations with the West far more safely in a Slavophile language.

This is why my intention is not to follow up the relationship between cultural and political predilections. Rather I want to suggest that we are dealing here with a sort of "double" peripheral optics, which makes permeability of knowledge between different peripheries much easier but which also ensures that this knowledge arrives in an already adapted, refracted, sometimes anachronistic form.

Once more about the outsiders, or on Slavism as "Balkanism"

In an Orientalist perspective, the Russian, and more broadly speaking, the East-European Slavistic interest in the Balkans performs an essential yet paradoxical function. It is well known that Orientalism, or the West's discourse on the Orient, draws upon the history and the tradition of Western Oriental Studies. In other words, it rests on a lasting (pre-colonial and pre-modern) scholarly interest, on "an influential academic tradition" for which "the Orient is a specific kind of knowledge about specific places, peoples and civilizations" (Said: 203). A similar tradition of scholarly interest, let alone an influential resource of Western knowledge about the Balkans (or parts of them, with exception of the peculiar case of Greece), does not exist. Even today, there is no such thing as Balkan Studies in the sense of Oriental Studies.⁹ The problem

9 Drawing upon Maria Todorova's admission of the West's weaker interest in and belated "discovery" of the Balkans, as opposed to the Orient (Тодорова, 1999: 178), K. Fleming points out that to this day Balkan Studies does not exist as a discrete research field in the Western academia. The output on Balkan history is due largely to Balkan "experts",

of the Bulgarian looking for his image in the European mirror, unlike that of Said's "Oriental", was that quite simply he was missing there: he was not part of European history, European science was not interested in him, to Europe he was a "nobody". That was an identity problem very different from the one the Orient, distinguished by lengthy accumulation of erudite studies, was faced with. And, beyond any doubt, it was one that strongly affected both the Bulgarians' strategies for situating themselves in the world and their world-views. The original, arguably "Orientalist" interest to the Bulgarians and the Serbs had Slavic rather than Balkan underpinnings and was largely generated by dilettanti historians like Venelin and Rostislavich. As for the specialized scholarly study of Slavic, and later of Balkan cultures, histories and societies, tribute should be paid to the (pan)Slavicists of "Central" Europe, from Kollar and Kopitar to Jireček. Later, this line was followed by the first generations of native scholars, educated in Russia, Prague or Western Europe. Throughout the 19th century, concentration on the South-Slavic "peoples and civilizations" in these two cultural centers (marginal for the West but playing a formative role for the Balkan Slavs) prevailed over interest in the Balkans as "a specific space", and this scholarly attention was differentiated: the Slavic origins of the Bulgarians was the favored subject of Russian and Russian-educated Bulgarian scholars, whereas researchers from Central Europe were mostly concerned with Slavic linguistics, literature and folklore. It is no surprise indeed that the Bulgarian, as well as the Serb, should enter Europe with a Slavic cultural visa. From V. Aprilov onwards, with rare exceptions, the source of Bulgarians' symbolic capital and valuable cultural gestures has been their Slavic-Orthodox belonging. This is the source the Bulgarians have tapped into for their productive inscription in the European civilizational matrix, and through it they have filtered their criteria of evaluating what they saw as "their own" or "alien". The status of "Slavic Europe" was, of course, fundamental to the nature of this knowledge. According to Larry Wolff, the "intellectual artifice" and the West's hegemonic discourse of the European East, "politically inflected by aspects of Orientalism", emerged during the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment. (Wolff, 1994) In some recent analyses, the methodological premises of this view have been questioned and the temporal focus has been shifted to a much later period. (Adamovsky, 2005; Dupcsik, 1999; Confino, 1994)¹⁰ What is interesting in this debate, from the point of view of my topic, is whether and to what extent we could presume that there was a link between the Slavic Studies in the West and in the European East. In his

who address mostly newcomers or a non-specialist audience and whose interest in the Balkans has been sparked solely by contemporary political events. Academic knowledge of the Balkans in the true sense of the word is mostly being produced within the Balkan countries. In Western Europe and North America, on the other hand, this remains the province of researchers most of whom come from the Balkan region (Fleming: 1227-1228).

10 I am grateful to Guido Franzinetti (University of East Piedmont, Italy) for focusing my attention on these studies.

recently published study on the emergence of the concept of “Eastern Europe” in France, E. Adamovsky argues that until the 1840s the existence of such a thing as a Slavic world, as distinct from Romano-German Europe, was an abstract issue, occupying the minds of Herder’s romantic adepts, such as Madame de Staël, rather than those of researchers. The very idea of Eastern Europe, i.e. the notion that a Slavic world not only existed but was also Eastern or Oriental, began to gradually take shape around the 1820s and make its way into the political vocabulary from the 1830’s onwards, but continued to co-exist with rival representations of geographical space. Until the end of the 19th century the concept drew on two intellectual contexts for its content – the liberal and the romantic (conservative as well as socialist). Significantly, whether it took on a positive or a pejorative connotation depended mostly on the political configurations, both domestic and international. Although during the last quarter of the century there were signs of hardening and predominance of the “Orientalist” visions, “there is nothing vaguely resembling a body of scholarship or “experts on Eastern Europe” in France before at least the 1860s”. In France as in the rest of non-Slavic Europe, one cannot speak about institutionalization of Slavic studies as part of the curricula or as specialized institutes, associations, periodicals and conferences before the second decade of the 20th century. It is not until this period that a hegemonic “Euro-Orientalist” discourse in the strictly Saidean sense of the word began to crystallize. (Adamovsky: 591-613) This seems important in more than one respect. Firstly, it shows that the Western discourse on Eastern Europe and that on the Balkans, without being identical, emerged simultaneously. The “knowledge of a specific place”, Said contends, following in Foucault’s footsteps, possesses the power “to dominate, restructure and exercise control” as long as it is incarnated in social practices and institutions, through which it gains consistency and the capacity to condition our worldviews. In other words, as long as this knowledge is authoritative and institutionalized, i.e. scientific. Balkanism is no exception, not even during the time of its early coalescence which is the 19th century. When M. Todorova points out that not academic discourse but journalistic and quasi-journalistic literary forms were “the most important channels and safeguards of balkanism as an ideal type”, she refers to the ability of the modern press to sustain “popular mythology” or ideology independently of scholarly knowledge. (Тодорова, 1999: 58-59) In the 19th century, however, there was virtually no such (I would still say relative and limited) independence of the two types of discourse. Firstly, because those who did research and taught at universities were usually the same who propagated and “mythologized” through the press; and secondly, because at that time the press, in contrast to science, did not possess the autonomous authority and status that it acquired in the conditions of mass society, especially after World War II. In any case, it is quite significant that even undemanding analyses by professional journalists sought their readers’ trust and approval by referring (with more or less justification) to the weighty

word of the scholars. The fact that in the Bulgarian case the scholars in question came from a part of Europe which was itself undergoing a process of “re-evaluation” should be seen as further indication that the emergence of the Bulgarian in the eyes of Europe was not an altogether emancipating act. It was because of its academic authority that the gaze of Slavacists and Slavophiles had such a formative yet, as it turned out, also ambiguous significance for the Bulgarians. Before that gaze Bulgarians appeared as, on the one hand, brothers-in-culture, perhaps forefathers, and in this sense fundamentally “of the same kin”; on the other hand, they were culturally “unsame”, “anomalously indefinable”, semi-European and semi-oriental, an internal or incomplete self, as they typically appeared in the lens of Western balkanism. Those who displayed love, sympathy and scholarly expertise in discovering the South Slavs for Europe, were the same who, by virtue of that same expertise, partook in the empowerment and crystallization of the balkanist discourse. Evidence of this seemingly unusual combination is the work of Dr. Konstantin Jireček – a Slavacist and a widely acknowledged authority in the history of Bulgaria and the Balkans. To speak of Jireček as of an architect and propagandist of the balkanist discourse sounds heretical. Here is how he described himself in an anonymous article on Bulgaria, addressed to a Viennese newspaper: “The Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Dr. Konstantin Jireček, [is] an Austrian Slav, famous for his work on the history and geography of the Balkan Peninsula, and especially of Bulgaria; he is in any case a Bulgarophile of the purest kind, whose *History of the Bulgarians* is a widely known and widely read popular book in this country.” (Аргиров, 1939: 158) Jireček’s numerous merits for the development of Bulgarian history as a scholarly field, for the reforming of Bulgarian education and the building of Bulgaria’s modern state institutions can hardly be overestimated. His harshness on the Bulgarians, particularly his overt contempt for their provincialism, egalitarianism and parochial mentality, on the other hand, have been interpreted entirely through the prism of his cultural aristocratism and political conservatism. These are no doubt crucial and often valid landmarks, but along with the assessments spurred by them one could discern the systematic construction of a peculiar image of Bulgaria, the Balkans and the Orient; an image that we normally associate with civilizers with other “European visions” and with other motives. In his intriguing “Notes on Bulgaria”, published in foreign newspapers, Jireček never abandons the superior position of a scholar and an outside observer endowed with the valid criteria and knowledge. From this position the Bulgarians and their infancy in statecraft are seen as presenting “a bountiful field for interesting studies on folk psychology and socio-political development”. Jireček’s well-know thesis about “the great danger incipient in bestowing all at once truthful copies of the most sophisticated Western constitutions on peoples that had lived under conditions of most primitive state and culture” becomes the focal point of images and qualifications which leave no doubt as to which part of the West-East civilizational

axis the informed Slavacist and Balkanist envisaged for the Bulgarians. Even their elite was composed of “poorly educated demagogues and simple peasants”, “a motley mixture of primitive figures”, driven by “purely personal sympathies and antipathies, so widely spread in the Orient”. This pseudo-intelligentsia, marked with “an absence of love for the truth and lack of energy” as well as with “a crude materialism”, extended its ideals no further than the accumulation of tasteless wealth; it indulged in “numerous feasts with tremendous fun”, “each one concerned with saving his own skin – a telling spectacle of the spineless impotence of the former slaves, whose cowardly cunning shows off so vividly against the brutal sincerity of the European.” The most distinguished members of the elite were people like Petko Karavelov – “a well read scatter-brained homespun philosopher with a less than glamorous appearance” – and Petko R. Slaveykov, whose speeches in the National Assembly provided an example of “spiritually poor Byzantine phraseology, uncouth in its form and even feebler in its content”. On the whole, this was a “wonderful carnival, a living ensemble of ridiculous caricatures ...that could well be portrayed by a Swift or a Cervantes.” As for the majority of the Bulgarians, if one did not count the residents of Eastern Rumelia, they “occupy the lowest rung of economic development; even the peasants from around Sofia with their bear-like figures, dirty sheepskin coats and heavy fur caps, as ugly in appearance as apes, should be counted among the most backward people on our continent.” That these were, after all, “people on our continent” was confirmed only by the scanty indications that the Bulgarians had their own history and were responsive to civilizing initiatives. The indirect but compelling evidence in this respect was Eastern Rumelia: there “an organic statute devised by a European committee rather than by local individuals” and an Assembly composed of “decent Bulgarians of European education” (“and not a single graduate of the Russian schools”) gave the whole province a European atmosphere of prosperity. The greatest hopes were laid on the European prince: “a giant knightly figure, two heads taller than his subjects”. The outlines of Jireček’s presentation of the Bulgarians are summarized in the following passage in one of his articles: “Now the population of the principality comprises peasants: good-natured, industrious and capable folk, who can, over time, win the foreigner’s heart, especially in some mountain areas; there is also an urban community of semi-intellectuals, who, with a few honorable exceptions, have clustered in their personality a wonderful amalgam of the worst aspects of Byzantine, Turkish, Russian and Western civilizations. Given these political factors, of course, there is not much to be done. There is, however, a completely new generation trained in the spirit of progress, a generation of specialist education and knowledge of the world; their number will be constantly on the rise with the return from emigration of hundreds of Bulgarian students.” (Аргиров, 1938; 1939) Let me stress that these undoubtedly artistic and amusing analyses constructed in a most authoritative way the image of the Bulgarians, who had just emerged on the political map of Europe,

for the rest of the Slavs and for the West.¹¹ In this particular case we are dealing with a series of articles that not only “inform public opinion in Europe on the state of affairs in Bulgaria” but were also recommended by diplomatic representatives in Sofia as “a most accurate picture of the situation”. The Austrian envoy even suggested that these “reports” be bought “in many copies” and distributed among the Austrian diplomatic offices around Europe as “a memorandum”. (Аргиров, 1938: 183) Thus the tradition of Slavism – so crucial, let us emphasize again, to “the discovery” of the Bulgarians by Europe – proved paradoxically capable of accommodating a shared, often exalted Slavic messianism and an Orientalist distance undermining the idea of a pan-European cultural belonging. However, both tendencies – romantic pan-Slavism and Slavic balkanism – bore the marks of their “Easteuropean” origin, either as a manifestation of cultural revenge on or as an act of identification with the liberal, not just epistemological (ethnocentric or Enlightenment) map of modernity. The reality of “Slavic-European dualism” and the longing for “an organic synthesis” between the Slavic and the European, both of which B.Yotsov defines as underlying Bulgarian culture in the 20th century, are indications of the indelible imprint that the contradictions of this discovery have left on Bulgarians’ patterns of European self-identifications and receptions. It should be clear by now that some major elements of both the positive, often mimetic and hypertrophied, and the negative, “Balkanized” Bulgarian (and at least partly Serbian) self-perception had been imported by foreign intellectuals, whose perspective was not that of the European center but that of the European periphery. The original symptoms and the “sublimation” of cultural deficiency were evoked by the non-West. The latter’s projections, drawing upon specialized knowledge, anticipated and later participated in the formation of the local perceptions of the West. Along with everything else, this comes to show that no unified “Euro-Orientalism” – a homogeneous Western discourse on the Balkan East – existed. Nor did a single Balkan Occidentalism either.

Turcophilia or Europhilia

However paradoxical – again! – it might seem at first glance, the most ardent and unequivocally pro-Western patriots proved to be...the Turkophiles! (the Uniates came second). The case is worth noting, since it points to one more ambivalent channel for the (positive) spread of knowledge about the West. The *Turciya* newspaper, a major forum of the Constantinople-based Bulgarian community, strongly championed the modernization of Bulgarian society within the political framework of the Ottoman Empire and the cultural

11 N. Aretov has also established in Jireček’s travel writings “manifestations of an Orientalist discourse” which give rise, in response, to “something like an ‘Occidentalism’ discourse” (Аретов, 2003: 208-220).

framework of the West. That this stance was above all politically motivated is neither surprising nor really important in view of our topic. (Although one could take note of the fact, for example, that the first nine Bulgarians, who had received some education in England, were sent there in 1835 on state stipends by the Ottoman government.) “As much as our material interests move us in the direction of the West, our intellectual and moral interests do so even more strongly. Our nation is in need of an example for its material, economic and intellectual improvement, in need of emulating a more enlightened nation and learning the whole lot from it. We cannot find this learning, this emulation and this example in Russia. [...] Science and letters shine nowhere but in the West, as we already know... Civilization is to be found nowhere but in Western Europe; there we find scientific and literary centers whose rays of light shine all over the world. Let us therefore turn to the light, let us walk to our civilizational salvation that will breathe new life in us and let us leave aside the dormant East that will bury us in its grave” (*Turcija*, [1869], [1873]). It is remarkable that this concept of the East as the polar opposite of the West entirely excluded the Ottoman Empire (but not Russia). It should be stressed, at the same time, that the “Turcophiles” did not speak on behalf of an anti-nationalist agenda: on the contrary, they firmly championed “national rights” and the “principle of nationality”, which meant independence for the Bulgarian church and modern utilitarian education. This raises the broader issue of the Ottoman channels of access to and reception of “Europe” – an issue generally overlooked by the national historiographies in the region. The neglect is no doubt functional in nationalist terms. From a non-national position, however, it is obvious how broad the zone of common key *topoi* between the Ottoman reformers and the Balkan nationalists was with their shared faith in progress, science and technology, education and knowledge. The generally professed belief that a “new age” was dawning, an age of “constant improvement and advancement”, was first articulated by and became the underlying refrain of the official propaganda of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms. “Civilization” or “civilized” must have been first heard of – usually in their adapted French form (*sivilizasyon*, *sivilize*) – in a *Tanzimat* usage (Strauss: 48). The Turcophile Bulgarian nationalists were not at all the only ones who identified the “new age” with the benevolence and enlightenment of the Turkish sultan. But even those who did not do so were acculturated into the same *Zeitgeist*, marked by the *Tanzimat* Ottoman language about Europe and modernity. Let me cite just one example. P.R.Slaveykov has been widely, and rightly, recognized by historiography as a fervent supporter and the first champion of the cause of women’s education in the 1860’s (Чолакова, 1994; Даскалова, 1998; Паскалева, 1984) Yet Slaveykov’s progressive views on this matter actually took shape only after the adoption of the Ottoman law on state schools, which was strongly influenced by the French model of state schools. In addition to instituting a three-stage educational system and introducing the compulsory teaching in the Ottoman language after the primary stage, this law

for the first time provided for women's education and the establishment of a teacher-training school for girls. Nationally conscious Bulgarians, including Slaveykov, responded with alarm and rage to this allegedly direct threat to the Bulgarian ethnos, which they strove to "revive". Their alarm preceded the proclamation of the law itself, since after the mid-1860s Midhad Pasha advanced and experimented with the idea of mixed schools for Muslims and Christians. At that time Slaveykov was firmly convinced that the resistance to ideas of this sort should be a duty of the clergy. For him the Bulgarian woman was still without a clear national mission despite of the fact that in Stara Zagora, and later in Gabrovo, the education for girls and the women's movement had already picked up momentum. However, after the Ottoman state proclaimed equal rights of education for all girls and boys in the Empire, Slaveykov assigned the protection of the national faith and language to Bulgarian women. Only then did their educational and social status become a benchmark of the "progress of the nation".¹² Yet when weighed against the stridently propagated political positions of the prevailing radical currents of the national movement, this "unnatural" symbiosis of "Turkey" with the West must have done more harm than good to the latter's reputation. Uncritical or excessive Westernism, now largely equated with Turcophiles and Uniates, became an attribute of the opportunists, traitors, anti-nationals for those who wanted to see the destruction of the Empire. The Ottoman "channel" looms large in yet another sense. The most important connection of the Balkans with the general Western development was the one via the Ottoman Empire, particularly via its disintegration – that is, through the *Eastern question*. It is well known that the Eastern question was as much Western as it was Eastern – not only in geopolitical terms, but also in terms of defining the forms of communication with the West and the channels of Western intervention thus fostering nationalism and modernity. However, its complexity unveils a rather ambiguous "understanding of the West". At its core, the Eastern question was above all an outcome of the opening up of the Ottoman Empire to the West or, in a narrower sense, of the series of reactions to the spread of capitalism in the Near East. The issue is far from simple though. We can safely assume that the central interest of the West as regards the rest of the world was the interest of capitalism. But until the 19th century, capitalism was not a universal European phenomenon, but instead one firmly established in the westernmost part only; moreover, not all great powers belonged to *that* West; yet even Russia was west in relation to the Ottoman Empire. At any rate, capitalism is linked to rationalism whilst diplomacy, particularly that of the Eastern Question, not necessarily. The "West" that emerged out of the amalgam of the

12 Indicative of the first phase in P. Slaveykov's views are the articles "Public Education" (Македонија, 20th May 1867) and "The School Issue" (Македонија, 11th November 1867). Relevant to the second phase are his brochure *On the Issue of Women* (1869) and his article "Woman: Her Significance in the Circle of Society and Her Upbringing in Bulgaria" (Македонија, 26th July, 1869).

Eastern Question, far from being an abstraction, was tangible and incoherent: one made up of individual actors as well as components that rarely agreed among themselves. (Scopetea, 1991: 136-137)

The West of the Baptizers

It is difficult to exaggerate the scale and intensity of Catholic and Protestant missionary labor, which unfolded on the battlefield of school, text-book production and translations of holy texts – in short, in the fields of education and publication – across European Turkey, especially since the 1850s. As Cyrus Hamlin, the chief of the Methodist Board and founder of Robert College noted in 1856, “The greatest contest which Protestantism has had with Rome since the era of the Reformation will doubtless be in Turkey” (Hall: 21). Before the opening of the French lyceum in Galata-Saray in 1868, only two schools in the Ottoman Empire – the Protestant missionary Robert College and the Catholic missionary Bebek College – granted a secondary education recognized by the major European universities. Their attraction for the children of the most “elevated” Balkan strata was also sustained by the well-known fact that none of the schools of the subject Christians could offer a comparably systematic and creditable education. If we calculate the remarkable proportion of these schools’ graduates among the Balkan intelligentsia and their even more remarkable share in Bulgarian leadership, we can understand why it is necessary to analyze the implications of this “West-informing” education.

Catholic or French?

French education, to a much greater extent than Anglo-Saxon education, provides a perfect example of what N. Guenchev calls “organized cultural and political penetration”. (Генчев, 2003: I, 559) In the 19th century, the French law did not allow for granting scholarships to schools in the mother country to individuals who were not of French origin or did not come from the colonies. No wonder, then, that the number of Bulgarians who had attended schools in France amounted to only 73 (half of them were medical students). In contrast, during the last two decades preceding the foundation of the new Bulgarian state the number of Bulgarians going to French schools in the Ottoman Empire steeply increased – from around 40 until the mid-1850s to as many as 1000 on the eve of the Russo-Turkish War. (Генчев, 1979: 245-246; idem, 1991: 235-236) This growth, however, was due to the established network of twenty-nine primary Catholic schools, where many young Bulgarians experienced their first encounter with the West and its teachers. Whatever the European spirit that these institutions might have exuded, there is little doubt that it was conveyed by missionaries, for whom French education was above all a tool of Catholic proselytism, while in cultural and political terms it had

not much to do with the “ideas of the French Revolution” and the Enlightenment.

Bibles and Sewing Machines: Protestant Education and Culture

The contribution of Protestant, American and British, missions in the preparation of “modern” Balkan elites is well known. The translation of the Bible and many Anglo-Saxon textbooks into the “modern Balkan vernaculars” (Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian); the beginnings of the “modern” Balkan journalism (the missionary printing press in Smyrna being the most outstanding example); especially education and the supply of literature in “modern disciplines” – all these major inputs of missionary work have long been recognized by protagonists and scholars alike. As researchers dealing with the reception of foreign ideas in that period have pointed out, the infiltration into the Bulgarian ethnic space of both American and English culture preceded that of American or British politics, taking the form of missionary initiatives and Protestant educational projects. (Трендафилов: 86) Yet, we still know very little about the kind of “modern” influence the Protestant missionaries and their institutions exercised, in particular of the kind of knowledge of the West, of Western values and institutions, they spread. Serious research on this issue is still needed. What Ivan Shishmanov said in 1897 of Bulgaria, namely, that “the American missionaries [were] the earliest and most direct mediators between America and Bulgaria” (Shishmanov: 54), is also true in equal measure for Greece and the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire in general. The Protestants possessed the widest foreign educational network ever established in the Empire.

Protestant missionary societies, much like the British Bible Societies, were products of the evangelical reaction to eighteenth century rationalism and formalism. They saw their work in the Balkans as a three-fold one: literary, educational and evangelistic. Yet, as William W. Hall has argued in his *“Puritans in the Balkans”*, “It should be borne in mind that publication and schools were both agencies of evangelism; and that publication and preaching were as much instruments of education as the operation of schools. The three aspects of missionary activity overlap and merge in to one another” (Hall: 6). Eugene Weber had something similar in mind when listing the Protestants, next to the public schools, among the “recognized agents of modernity” in late nineteenth-century Catholic France (Weber: 397). There is little doubt that the Protestant missionary Holy Cross traveled along with – if not exactly the American Dollar and Flag – at least American accessories, gadgets and inventions. “The missionaries came to Bulgaria with their Bibles and sewing machines. Crowds of women, Bulgarian and Turkish, came to watch. Eventually, these machines were sold locally” (Clarke: 314). The amazingly syncretic way Protestants themselves looked on their “missionary

imperialism” is best expressed in the words of a contemporary enthusiast in 1881: “No contact with Western Civilization has ever roused the Oriental from his apathy, but when his heart is warmed into life by Gospel truth, his mind awakens, and he wants a clock, a book, a glass window, and a flour mill. Almost every steamer that leaves New York for the Levant brings sewing machines, watches, carpenter’s tools, cabinet organs or other appliances of Christian civilization in response to native orders that never would have been sent but for the open Bible” (cit. in Clarke: 315). The equation drawn between high technological standards, open-mindedness, religious freedom, civilization in general, on the one hand, and Protestantism, on the other, was no doubt a major part of the message that Protestant missionaries brought to the Balkans. Where does this missionary story leave us? “We don’t know what to think”, a leading Bulgarian revivalist wrote in untypical confusion. Most of the members of the Bible Society were Americans, “whom we have learned to respect and esteem”; therefore it was hard to believe that “these same men who were supposed to have the last word about the moral and physical freedom of man” were preaching Evangelical ideas and sowed delusions instead of freeing the human mind and “show[ing] the true road that leads each nation to its happiness and betterment ... Is it time now to preach scholastic dogmas...?” (Каравелов: 117-118). A problem must have indeed existed: those to whom it fell to acquaint the East with the secular Western culture represented a stage in the Western cultural development, which in the West itself had been long and irreversibly lost (Scopetea 1991: 137). So, the West but without rationalism?

America among the Bulgarians: teachers, students and lessons

In many respects the Protestant transmission brings into focus some contradictions and ambiguities similar to the ones already discussed which characterized the knowledge prevailing in the Bulgarian public milieu about the European and American “West”.¹³

At the same time, since this transmission, unlike the Greek or the Slavic one, played a mostly indirect role in the formation of national identity, its closer examination could take us straight to answering the central question that concerns us here: from whom and what did Bulgarians know about “the

13 As Vl. Trendafilov suggests in his wonderful study on the Bulgarian reception of England in the 19th century, “On the whole, the reception of England, which reached us through Protestantism, assumed enormous dimensions...and English influence in this case was inevitably substantial. It was, however, rather dispersed since only a tiny part of it came through the original language; the emphasis of its bearer was religious rather than ethnocentric... But if we focus on the journalistic work of at least two key figures of the Bulgarian Revival, such as P. R. Slaveykov and Iliya Blaskov, we will witness a considerable reception of England in the choice of subjects, in the selection of values, and in the concepts used.” (Трендафилов: 90-91)

West” in the 19th century? In order to proceed with our quest for the answer, it seems imperative to make an important distinction: between the real, often unpremeditated effect of Protestant presence and innovations on the life of Bulgarians, on the one hand, and the representations, often premeditated, of England and America, of English-ness (or European-ness) and American-ness in the public milieu. All of the above-mentioned contributions of the Protestant missions in the sphere of (modern, including women’s) education, literature, translation and publishing (especially for the needs of schools), served as a catalyst for the processes of modernization of Bulgarian society and laid the foundations of the positive reception of two Western cultures: the English and the American. Until then such reception was practically non-existent. The direct practical and institutional help that the missionaries provided for the Bulgarian national movement was recognized and praised by all “awakeners of the nation”; it was this support that mostly accounted for the respect that Bulgarians felt for the Protestants. That the aid and its acknowledgment were not just a side effect of Protestant proselytism is evident from Dr. A. L. Long’s words in a lecture entitled “Slavs and Bulgarians”, which was delivered at Robert College in 1870 and which could well be assigned to a Czech Slavophile: “Come to think of it, a hundred and eleven years before the discovery of America Bulgaria fell under foreign rule... The unprejudiced student of history cannot resist being sympathetic and cannot help taking an active part in the destiny of a people which, after this dismal night, and in the fog of 400 years, has not forgotten its name, its language and even the name of its Christian religion.” (Македония IV, 62) Most highly esteemed among the Protestant institutions, which not only fostered affection for Anglo-Saxon intellectual and political culture but also promoted national self-awareness and a sense of national mission among its disciples, were Robert College and, for a shorter spell, the girls’ teacher-training school in Stara Zagora – these “pépinières of our education”, as Ivan Shishmanov respectfully calls them. (Шишманов: 53) The disproportionately large participation of these schools’ alumni, especially those of Robert College, in the politics, diplomacy, administration and culture of the young Bulgarian state is a well known and well studied fact.¹⁴ It is difficult to say whether the cultivation of awareness of “the latest bourgeois socioeconomic theories” and of “an independent spirit and civic values” (Ilchev, 1981: 56) accounted for it or, on the contrary, it was due to the isomorphia of mentoring values in the “transmitting”, mostly British, environment and in the “receiving” Bulgarian one. (Трендафилов: 88-89) Perhaps there is a grain of truth in both these explanations. We should not fail to remark at that, that the College was not representative of the level of teaching and teaching staff in the other missionary schools. It is certain, however,

14 I will only cite here I. Ilchev and P. Mitev’s work, which is the most recent study on this topic for the period after 1878 (Илчев, И. и П. Митев, 2003). The study contains a bibliography of earlier contributions to the subject. Cf. Илчев 1981: 57-62.

that what distinguished and brought to the fore this relatively small group of alumni of the various Protestant institutions was their corporatist spirit and their confidence that they were tailored differently, that they thought differently, behaved differently, that they were the elite.¹⁵ Not all of these contributions, however, were deliberately pursued. The democratic provisions underlying the Statute of the newly founded Bulgarian Exarchate (1870) were considered, then and later, as being affected by “the new liberal-Protestant views”, as Manyu Stoyanov dubbed them. Even more telling are the constructive manifestations of “defense through mimicry” which the Protestants inspired. Examples in point are the girls’ teacher-training school, which the Bulgarian municipality in Stara Zagora opened in 1863 in response to the Protestant one, or the Women’s Association in the same town under the leadership of the school’s headmistress Anastasiya Tosheva – the first public organization fighting for equal access of women to education. Here was a case of appropriation of the Protestant cultural ideal of the educated Christian woman through which the Bulgarian woman had discovered her own mission as a guardian and protector of the national religion and culture, a mission epitomizing both tradition and progress. This was thus the role of a key figure in the process of attaining national self-consciousness. It would not be an overstatement to say that, on the whole, the movement for women’s rights was inspired by the Anglo-Saxon Protestant model of the educated woman which was “re-contextualized to serve the national cause as a narrative of progress and modernity”. (Reeves-Ellington: 165-166) On many other occasions of contact of Anglo-Saxon models with the local environment the “mimicry” underwent similar “re-contextualizations” and re-definitions.¹⁶ There were finally some sides to the missionaries’ activity which discredited their mission and repelled the Bulgarians. Most discouraging and insurmountable proved the incompatibility of the Reform with the principles of ethnicity: “How could you be at the same time a Protestant and a Bulgarian to them [the Bulgarians] seems inconceivable”, one missionary bitterly concluded in 1870 (cit. in Ангелова: 105) The fears of the “deadly virus” of proselytism were interwoven with the insult to a fragile cultural self-esteem: the Protestants preached,

15 See also Илчев, 2004: 110-112. James F. Clarke, the missionary who spent the longest spell in Bulgaria, probably meant something in the same sense when he said that the mission’s teachers “had a definite role to play in the formation of some national leaders’ personalities” (after Генев: 83).

16 In the perspective of the nationally-committed Bulgarian historiography, the results of such adaptations, are by definition attributed to the “naturally” growing spiritual and political strength of Bulgarian society, i.e. they would be seen as an inherently Bulgarian product. However, if we only consider the sphere of education as an example, not only the scale but also the content of the Bulgarian educational movement could not be accounted for without the formative contribution of the “mimetic resistance” against Greek and later Protestant education. “Here is our response: open your own schools and make them work, provide them with the equipment needed for good study, hire some conscientious and decent teachers, and you will see that the Protestant school will prove but a passing fad.” (Право, 1873) Similar appeals could be found in practically all newspapers from the 1850s onwards.

a teacher from Shumen wrote, “as if Bulgarians were downright savage and primitive like their African slaves.” (cit. in Стефанов: 41) This association of missionary propaganda with the colonizing of the “savage slaves” proved resilient and generated furious indignation: “Let us show those Popish hounds and Protestant agents around us”, appealed one of Rakovsky’s associates, “that the Bulgarian people does not live in the scorching deserts of Africa or in distant America.” (cit. in Колев: 43) Evidence of the facile transfer of this association to the image of the Americans at large is Ivan Bogorov’s reaction to the words of a “bigwig American”, whom he had accompanied on a voyage through Bulgaria: at the sight of the woods and the meadows at some point during their trip the enchanted American exclaimed: “This is American Europe!” – to which Bogorov’s commented: “Of course, this smart mouth may have taken us, too, for America’s black slaves.” (Богоров: 199) These examples make it evident that some cultural stereotypes, triggered by the encounter of Western missionaries with the Bulgarian environment, worked not only against their chances of success but against their reputation of spiritual mentors and civilizers which by definition they were. On the other hand, on the level of representations – mostly in the press, in textbooks and through translations – one could distinguish between two general attitudes. One was intentionally didactic, often mentoring, and utopian. It pursued a, so to speak, constructive national goal: it was not the plausible description or the true dimensions of American experience that mattered in this case. What mattered was the ability of that experience to generate models and utopias which were deemed fundamental to the moral and civic education of Bulgarians as well as to their instruction into the virtues of national statehood. This accounted for the numerous translations and editions of Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack* with its utilitarian moral recipe for success in life. This also accounted for the abiding interest in the American system – political, social, educational, and religious – of many eminent Bulgarian revolutionaries or reformers like Lyuben Karavelov and Petko R. Slaveykov. The possibility they saw in the American model to verify the applicability of “the most progressive”, “the most democratic” and “the most righteous” principles, served to illustrate their own utopias of a harmonious society. Lyuben Karavelov in particular used the idealized image of America to pit his own ideal of a “truly liberal republican regime”, which had established “equity and justice” as well as absolute individual, religious and national freedom, against a morally and politically decaying Europe. “In America we can see fifty denominations and fifty nations living together, referring to themselves as Americans and defending their common interests; all of this stems from the fact that the people are their own tutors and they forge their own laws, to their own liking and of their own will” (“Свобода” [1870])¹⁷ P. R. Slaveykov had his own set of landmarks

17 Indicative of L. Karavelov’s ideological use of the American model is also the fact that most of his references and comments appeared in articles that were not devoted to

of the perfect social harmony: “greatest political and religious freedom, least religious bigotry, utmost respect for law and peace, an incredibly prosperous and gainful livelihood – in short, through education Americans have reached such heights in their political, social and economic life that no other nation in Europe and worldwide has ever reached.” (“Македония”, [1871]). It was not so much the familiarity of American life, but rather the fixation on a particular social perspective and the desire to focus all social energies on it, that triggered the vision of the American ideal. (cf. Бонева: 202) But is it indeed inconceivable that the national revivalists should have believed that such a perfect world really existed across the Atlantic? The point is that, along with the utopian, there was also another line of representations of America – pragmatic, detached, at times critical – which was again the product of the same national ideologues. The quality of information varied here, and the presentations were quite unsystematic, but on the whole, the didactic principle was retained however with a reverse sign. Thus at the end of the 1860s, the *Macedonia* newspaper published a few translations of novellas with American plots revolving around various dodgy characters and filled with violence, crude material interest and corruption. Petko Slaveykov, the “skilled manipulator of public opinion” (Бонева: 202) even created a poem called “The Wild American Woman and the Tame European”, where he highlighted the murky origins of the New World and reshuffled the moral hierarchy of “the wild” and “the tame”: universal, humane and noble values were associated with the “wild Americans”, whereas the “tame Europeans” were identified with aggression, greed, moral deficiency and inhumanity. (“Гайда”, [1865]) What brings these seemingly conflicting images together is, if I borrow from Vl. Trendafilov’s observations, the conspicuously “self-mirroring” nature of local, not only Bulgarian, national cultures: the harnessing of foreign ideas and facts for the illustration of native realia in pursuit of immediate aspirations and fears, for the sake of one specific objective or another. This politics of representation “makes the reception functional, but also distorts beyond recognition the image of the foreign cultural import”. (Трендафилов: 242)¹⁸

America, but rather to universal issues concerning the principles and applications of liberalism, the parliamentary regime and democracy, the international state of affairs, education, the constitution of the Church, the question of women’s rights etc. See in particular the *Свобода*, *Независимост* and *Libertatea* newspapers from the 1860s and the first half of the 1870s. (Каравелов, 1967; cf. Митев: 190-197).

- 18 The cases of adding a Bulgarian touch to translated texts, including a replacement of foreign with Bulgarian social types, are well known to students of the literature of the “national revival”. Vl. Trendafilov gives an example of yet another replacement of context. In an article entitled “Popular Education – the English Schools”, published in the *Turtsiya* newspaper in 1872, we find the claim that schools in England “are supported by and depend on the people”. In the English context this would mean that they were either private or controlled by the municipalities rather than by the state. In the Bulgarian environment, however, this phrase, unspecified as it was left, made it seem as if English education were absolutely egalitarian and democratic. (Трендафилов: 78-79) What was important in many similar cases was to provide a praiseworthy example and to set the course for the *Bulgarian* education.

Dwelling on the issue of representations, we should not overlook yet another category of cultural mediation factors. It is well known that almost two-thirds of the books by Western authors, including books in the English language, had reached their readers through Greek and Russian translations. The implications of this situation are difficult to isolate yet essential. However faithful to the original these translations might be, the selection and the linguistic filter of the “Western” facts, ideas and values were tuned to a context different from both the original and the receiving environments. In this sense, “the reception of England was not so much created, but was, rather, borrowed ready-made from other nations”. (Трендафилов: 78; 241). Besides, in many instances the West’s normative self-images and self-representations, as well as Western concepts and ideas, reached the Balkans not just translated, but rather reinterpreted by ideologically and politically hostile intellectual milieus, like the Russian and the Austrian. The very criteria of the selection of the works for translation, and the entire issue of which were the key texts and figures building up the local images of *the normative West*, are important topics but they are too broad to be given here the treatment they deserve.

* * *

I will now try to summarize the part of my research presented here. By and large, few would question the constitutive significance of “the gaze of the Other” to any small culture seeking its identity. But of course, there is a heuristic deficiency to such sweeping generalizations. Because in actuality there exist many different gazes and many different (smaller and larger) Others, which often are in conflict with each other. Presupposing that there was a unified Orientalist vision and balkanist discourse would be as unfounded as the hypothesis of a single Balkan Occidentalism. On the contrary, the multifaceted and controversial Western intervention led to constructing – already at “the doorway” – distorted and incoherent images through which the West became familiar on the Balkans. Rather than witnessing a direct impact of “the centers of the spiritual vanguard” upon the “territories of cultural vacuum” (Генчев, 2003: I, 559) or, conversely, of an increasingly hardening balkanist discourse as “a Western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority” over the Balkans (Said: 3; ср. Тодорова, 1999: 31-60, *passim*), we can discern a number of different, often conflicting but certainly formative re-translations of the images of Europe. Later on these images came to be further re-shaped and re-modeled by local agents and by the socio-cultural dynamics of the local environment. This is why, instead of accepting “the concept of Europe” as a legitimate category of analysis, we had better ask ourselves who, when, for what purposes and with what results has resorted to this concept. To conceive of the existence of an invariable symbolic map of Europe and its “Orient” from the Enlightenment to this day, would be an amusing but ahistorical intellectual endeavor. To ignore the differences in sociocultural contexts, in the key interests, the national, class, religious, professional and

gender identity of those who forged the Balkan images of Europe could hardly help us in our quest to understand their dynamics and changes. “Euro-Orientalisms” can undoubtedly help us to untangle the civilizational coordinates on the map of Europe, but manipulations with that map are often subject to local conditions and objectives, often not linked to the relations with the West. An objection might be made that, however faithful this anatomy of the conception of Europe, it cannot explain the need for and the self-perpetuation of a normative, utopian or dystopian, notion of Europe.¹⁹ Indeed, it seems to be one thing to interrogate “empirical” knowledges about Europe yielding a variety of images but quite another to assume “Europe” as an ideology producing its own normative images. From my perspective, however, this question – much as the one about how “accurate” or how “distorted” these images were²⁰ – makes little sense. Theoretically so, in the first place, considering the actual dependence of ideology on knowledge. On the level of communication, *various meanings* of Europe have served to inform and legitimate elite discourse about the organization of society and set the agenda for debate. In view of this role, they come to be appropriated by different social groups and used as a weapon in their opposing each other. It would not be hard to imagine, for instance, how in the first half of the 1980s one could have written a well documented book on how the West invented an aggressive and menacing Eastern Europe rather than a backward and traumatized one (cf. Dupcsik: 13-14). “The point is that the Occidentalisms generated in the West and in the Balkans”, Wendy Bracewell argues in her study on the Balkan travel writings on Europe, “have been comparable, in terms of the range and diversity of form and of value attributed to the notion of ‘the West’ as much as in terms of the content of the idea. What is at stake may differ – authority over others at home, rather than colonial or imperialist power? – but in the end, what is important in determining their shape is the particular political context that these representations are embedded in.”(Bracewell, 2005:3) On the level of normative ideology, on the other hand, for the last three centuries the meaning of “Europe” has been coextensive with modernity – with the *idea of Europe* as a symbol of cultural superiority and power; on this level of abstraction, and on it alone, “Europe” proved capable to assimilate and withstand the sweeping changes of the modern era. This has at least two important consequences. First, we have to acknowledge the inherent controversy between these two levels in order to be able to account for the constant revision, renegotiation and reformulation of the episteme of “Europe”, both in the ‘West’ and in the ‘East’. Secondly, and more importantly, it invites us to return to the question of the origin of the constituting power of these (self-)representations after we have already named the processes and the agents

19 On Europe as utopia and dystopia, see Stråth: 26-28.

20 Just as the most authoritative Western “inventors” of Eastern Europe, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, never went east of Berlin (Wolff: 7), so too did the Eastern “discoverers” of Europe not have to visit ‘it’ in order to engage in this spiritual exercise.

that have made such “empowerment” possible. Hence my interest is focused on how concepts about “us” and the “other”, our cultural and social visions were historically mediated by concepts of Europe. Issues of cultural transfer form only a point of departure in terms of my on-going quest in this direction. My long-term purpose has been to indicate that Balkan visions of Europe cannot be understood as simply mirroring imagination of the Western hegemonic discourse about the Balkans. In order to understand these visions, more attention needs to be paid to local dynamics in the production of ideologies and self-narrations. This means one must also come to an historical understanding of the regional discourses of identity. That would, by the same token, reinstate the Balkans as a legitimate field of study and reveal its theoretical potential. My aim therefore is to decouple Western representations from the local production of ideologies and images. Interaction between them was no doubt long-standing and intensive yet it implied more than internalizing and resisting Western hegemonic discourse and superior power. In this process the normative, symbolic, encoded – in short the ideological function of *Europe* is significant and evident, however only as a metaphor of modernity rather than by virtue of an ideological semantics of its own. Thus reframed, the central question moves us away from the study of the stigmatic balkanist self-images towards historical comparatively-informed reconstruction of the ambivalences of the projects of modernization in the Balkans and of the diverse intellectual responses given to them. In terms of access to knowledge of Europe, the case of the Bulgarians was perhaps extreme since direct contact was limited. An extreme case, yes, but not at all exceptional: to the rest of the Balkans and for the most of the century access to Europe was largely mediated as well, each Balkan country having its Greeks, Russians, and Protestants; its well-trained Slavists as well. My survey of the “agents of transmission” has been no doubt partial in terms of range and selective in terms of national cases. The deeper implications of each of these “refractions” still await further careful investigation. My goal here was to suggest a perspective and indicate some of its ramifications, rather than to apply it in any comprehensive way – in the hope, however, that, with appropriate adjustments, it can be found applicable to other cases in the Balkans and beyond.

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